

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SP-02 AID-05 EB-07 NSC-05 CIEP-01

TRSE-00 SS-15 STR-01 OMB-01 CEA-01 L-02 H-02 CIAE-00

COME-00 FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04

SIL-01 PM-03 DODE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 INT-05 IO-10

AGR-05 FEA-01 OES-03 /108 W
----- 059361

P R 142100Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7513

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 0605

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT ELAB TD

SUBJECT: TENSIONS HEIGHTEN AS LABOR IMPASSE DEEPENS

REF: POS 569 AND PREVIOUS

1. TWO WEEKS AFTER PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS' RETURN TO THE COUNTRY, LABOR CONFRONTATIONS HAVE DEEPENED FURTHER AMIDST VIRTUAL INACTION AT POLITICAL LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT.

2. TEXACO IS NOW COMPLETELY SHUT DOWN. THE SUGAR INDUSTRY IS SHUT DOWN, AND A WILDCAT STRIKE YESTERDAY SHUT DOWN TRINIDAD MARINE LTD. (TRINMAR), THE OFFSHORE DRILLING AND MARINE TERMINAL OPERATION JOINTLY OWNED BY TRINTOC, TESORO AND TEXACO.

3. THE RECENTLY FORMED UNITED LABOR FRONT (ULF) COMPRISING THE OILFIELD WORKERS TRADE UNION (OWTU--WEEKES), THE "ALL TRINIDAD" SUGAR WORKERS (PANDAY) AND THE CANE FARMERS (SHAH) HAS ANNOUNCED A "PRAYER MARCH" FROM THE SOUTH NEXT WEEK TO PORT OF SPAIN,
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WHERE THEY WILL ALLEGEDLY CAMP ON THE CENTRAL

SAVANNAH IN FRONT OF WHITEHALL (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE) "UNTIL THEIR GRIEVANCES ARE MET." ACTIVE PICKETING HAS BEGUN AT TEXACO AND SOME WORKERS ARE CAMPED OUT OUTSIDE INSTALLATIONS. HEAVILY REINFORCED POLICE ARE PATROLLING TEXACO COMPOUND AND SO FAR THERE HAS BEEN NO OUTRIGHT CONFRONTATION OR VIOLENCE.

4. ALTHOUGH THE INDUSTRIAL COURT HAS OPENED PRELIMINARY PROCEDURAL HEARINGS ON THE OWTU-TEXACO IMPASSE, AND THE POLICE ARE PRIVATELY EXPRESSING CONFIDENCE THAT THEY CAN HANDLE ANY DISRUPTION OF PUBLIC ORDER BEFORE IT GETS OUT OF HAND, THERE HAS BEEN CONSPICUOUS INACTION BY PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL. SO FAR, THE RADICAL UNIONS HAVE HAD THE ENTIRE PUBLIC FORUM TO THEMSELVES AND IN A SITUATION WHERE, TO THE AVERAGE CITIZEN AT LEAST, THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE TIMID AND DOING NOTHING, RUMORS ARE ABOUNDING.

5. SOME FIREBRANDS APPARENTLY HOPE THAT THE PLANNED MARCH ON PORT OF SPAIN WILL SNOWBALL WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF RECRUITS FROM AMONG THE URBAN UNDER-EMPLOYED AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL CRUMBLE INTO THEIR HANDS. ON ANOTHER LEVEL, THE ENTIRE PLAYLET SEEMS AS CAREFULLY AND DELICATELY MANAGED TO AVOID DIRECT CONFRONTATION AS POSSIBLE. WEEKES' LEGAL ADVISORS AND PANDAY ARE SHREWD LAWYERS AND AT EACH STAGE HAVE CAREFULLY TAKEN ONLY THOSE ACTIONS WHICH SKIRTED JUST INSIDE THE LAW IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO LAY ANY ONUS FOR DIRECT REACTION ON THE GOVERNMENT. RECENTLY, WEEKES HAS SEEMED ALSO TO BE LAYING THE PUBLIC GROUND WORK FOR BLAMING ANY VIOLENCE OR GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON FOREIGN (READ USG) AGENTS PROVOCATEURS WHO ALLEGEDLY WISH TO SUBVERT TRINIDAD ON BEHALF OF THE MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS TO BE USED AS A TOOL AGAINST VENEZUELAN OIL POLICY.

6. AS WILLIAMS' INACTION CONTINUES AND THE RADICALS GET MORE FEISTY, WE HAVE DETECTED A DISTINCT RISE IN UNEASINESS THIS WEEK AMONG SOME SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY. ON THE OUTSIDE, HOWEVER, LIFE GOES ON JUST AS USUAL
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FOR MOST. SOME SMALLER BUSINESSES ARE BEGINNING TO FEEL THE PINCH FROM SHORTAGES OF FUEL OR SUGAR AND ARE LAYING OFF WORKERS, SO THE ECONOMIC IMPACT IS GRADUALLY BECOMING MORE WIDESPREAD. SMALLHOLDER CANE FARMERS WILL DEFINITELY LOSE THEIR YEAR'S INCOME IF THEIR CANE IS NOT CUT AND GROUND IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WE SEEM POISED ON THE EDGE OF A VERY CRIPPLING STRIKE WHICH COULD REALLY BRING THINGS TO A STANDSTILL, YET, THIS BEING

TRINIDAD, THE LEAP MAY NEVER BE TAKEN.

7. IN ATTEMPTING TO EVALUATE THIS SITUATION THE GOALS OF THE UNION LEADERS SEEM RELATIVELY CLEAR: MAXIMUM POLITICAL GAINS VIS-A-VIS THE PNM GOVERNMENT, RESULTING AT LEAST IN THE FORGING OF A COMBINED SUGAR-OIL (I.E. EAST INDIAN AND NEGRO) COALITION RIDING HIGH IN AN ELECTION YEAR AGAINST A GOVERNMENT WHICH THEY HAVE FORCED TO APPEAR EITHER AS FECKLESS OR BRUTALLY OVER REACTIVE. THE MULTI-NATIONAL CORPORATIONS ARE ALSO A TARGET AT LEAST OF THE RADICAL LEADERSHIP.

8. OUR REAL PROBLEM IN ESTIMATING WHAT WILL DEVELOP IS THE CONTINUING SILENCE AND INACTION OF PM WILLIAMS SINCE HIS RETURN. HE HAS VIRTUALLY SEEN NO ONE SINCE RETURNING AND IS VARIOUSLY ALLEGED TO BE POUTING OR SIMPLY BIDDING HIS TIME. WE HAVE HEARD FROM RELATIVELY GOOD SOURCES THAT SOME OF THE TOP CABINET MEMBERS WHO WERE AWAITING HIS RETURN FOR KEY DECISIONS ARE FRUSTRATED AND DISMAYED AT THE CONTINUING DRIFT. PERHAPS YET HE WILL FOOL ALL THE SCEPTICS WITH A BRILLIANT POLITICAL MANEUVER SUCH AS HE WAS ONE RENOWNED FOR, OR PERHAPS THE SITUATION WILL SIMPLY PETER OUT. THE APPARENT ABSENCE OF GOVERNMENT FOCUS AND RESPONSE, HOWEVER, LEAVE THOSE WHO ARE CONCERNED WITH THE APPARENT THREAT TO THE STATUS QUO WITHOUT LEADERSHIP AROUND WHICH THEY CAN RALLY.

9. IF THE SITUATION ESCALATES FURTHER, IT MIGHT DEVELOP PRESSURES FOR THE GOTT TO MOVE AHEAD TO ACQUIRE SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION IN TEXACO TRINIDAD. SUCH A MOVE MIGHT NOT BE AN UNATTRACTIVE WAY
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FOR WILLIAMS TO TAKE SOME OF THE WIND OUT OF THE OWTU SAILS.

10. AT THIS MOMENT WE FEEL THE ODDS ARE STILL AGAINST REAL VIOLENCE OF ANY MAGNITUDE. NEVERTHELESS, WE HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY REVIEWING OUR EMERGENCY PLANNING AND HAVE ALSO TIGHTENED OUR LIAISON WITH THE POLICE.
MILLER

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